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THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN LEARNING IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

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EVEN MORE THAN A RATIONAL ANIMAL, MAN IS A SYMBOLIZING ANIMAL, CREATING HIS OWN CHANGING REPRESENTATIONS OF REALITY. INSTRUMENTAL TO THIS PROCESS IS LANGUAGE, FOR IT PROVIDES THE BEST MEANS FOR STRUCTURING BOTH PAST AND FUTURE EXPERIENCE. THE VERBALIZATION OF BOTH PERSONAL AND VICARIOUS EXPERIENCE MAKES US REEVALUATE AND RESTRUCTURE OUR REPRESENTATIONS OF REALITY. IF WE ARE TO EXPAND THE CHILD'S ABILITY TO DEVELOP COMPLEX AND EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF REALITY, WE MUST, THEN, ENCOURAGE HIM MORE NOT ONLY TO WRITE EXPRESSIVELY, POETICALLY, AND LITERALLY, BUT ALSO TO TALK AND VERBALIZE IN THE CLASSROOM. THE VERY EXPERIENCE OF VERBALIZATION, COMBINED WITH ACTIVITY, IS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR THE CHILD, AND A WAY OF GAINING CONTROL OVER A LARGER AND LARGER FRAME OF REFERENCE AND OF DEVELOPING HIS POTENTIAL FOR AN EXPANSIVE, PERCEPTIVE, AND INTELLIGENT LIFE. (THIS ADDRESS WAS DELIVERED AT THE SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION TRI-UNIVERSITY PROJECT IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION, FEBRUARY 1-3, 1968, NEW ORLEANS, LA. IT IS FOLLOWED BY A DETAILED CRITIQUE BY WILLIAM IVERSON OF THE STANFORD SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, AND COMMENTS OF DISCUSSION-GROUP LEADERS.) (DL)

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REASON AND CHANGE IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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The Role of Language in Learning in the Elementary School

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I want to begin by saying I'm honored, if not at the moment overwhelmed, by an invitation to come all the way from London to what is an American educational conference. I believe myself in talking, in the face-to-face exchange of talk as one of the most productive ways of learning. And, I like to think that since the Dartmouth conference in 1966, something of a trans-Atlantic dialogue has begun to take place - something which will be of value to countries on both sides of the Atlantic.

Part of that trans-Atlantic dialogue was conducted last Easter, when a team of visitors from Illinois came to look at secondary schools in England and Scotland. I recently went through some of the comments they made, unedited, before any report was written, and some of these struck me as extremely interesting. One that I want to mention to you, suggested by more than one of the Illinois observers, was to the effect that in our schools in England, we showed considerable success in getting the younger children in the secondary school - the 11 and 12 year olds - into a working community, but then with the 16 and 17 year olds, we failed to use that working capacity, and resorted to doing all the work ourselves from the teacher's desk.

I think that was a just comment, and I think it reflects the situation in England at the moment, where there exist side by side two traditions; and these two traditions come into conflict with each other. At the moment they are in head-on collision, in the discussions of the proposed new middle schools. It looks as though, ironically enough, we might have two kinds of middle school - one which is effected from the top downwards, and the other which is produced from the bottom upwards; and they'll be quite different. One of these two traditions I would call the "grammar school tradition", the "academic tradition" fathered by the grammar schools with godparents from Oxbridge (Oxford and Cambridge); a tradition that flowers in the pre-university sixth form, but which has met with massive failure in the comprehensive schools in trying to realize a policy of secondary education for all. The other tradition I would call, rather more dubiously, the "infant school tradition." I think the name is justified, although not entirely adequate. This tradition represents the sort of thing that's gone on in the infant schools at home for a very long time, that

is making its influence felt upwards and now affects about half of our junior schools, and is moving up to the secondary level. I suppose it would be boasting if I said it affects more than one-tenth of our secondary schools at the present time. The schools we selected for the Illinois team to go to, on their instructions, would be amongst those one-tenth. Since the examination system still supports the academic tradition and affects the top end of the age range, you will get within such schools a collision between these two views, represented by the younger and older age groups in the same schools. Sir Alec Clegg, who is one of our most prominent directors of education, in a television interview last week on the "raising of the school leaving age" contrasted the kind of learning that goes on in junior schools, where the infant school tradition has its hold, and what he called "knowledge peddling." Now, there are more favorable ways of describing the academic tradition than "knowledge peddling"; however, since I am pinning my faith to the other tradition, I let that stand as a means of raising at least a healthy opposition.

If you ask primary school teachers in England to describe what it is they are about, what it is they are setting out to do, I think you may hear some rather vague, and perhaps out-worn terms. "Learning through experience," "activity methods," "discovery methods," "child-centred curriculum," "rich environment," "integrated day," and if you press further and penetrate beyond these rather vague terms, I think you are likely to be given a somewhat homespun philosophy of education derived from actual classroom practice. All I want to say about that at the moment is that it's the very reverse of the too-slick educational theory, which is able to banish all reference to children to the footnote level. I want to make a very brief comment upon practice, not theory, at this stage - the practice in our junior schools at home.

A junior school classroom is likely to be a room full of things, things to look at and to read and talk about, and most of those would have been produced by the children in the school. And also things to do, things to play with, things to work with, things to work on. In most cases the children will be working individually, or in pairs or in threes or fours, and in most cases they will have chosen what it is they are doing. It will be noticeable that they are talking about it all the time they're doing it, to each other or to the teacher. Now, I know one primary school class in London where there are two items on the class time table. One is called "Your time" and the other is called "My time." What I have been describing to you goes on in "Your time." In "My time" the teacher will be explaining and discussing something with the class as a whole, or watching a dramatic improvisation that some group of children is putting on to show to the others, or reading stories or poems to the whole class, or possibly listening to a child telling the rest of the class something that he's done or read or dis-

covered. Cutting across even the two items of that rudimentary timetable will be such activities as going out for walks in the neighbourhood, visiting buildings, encounters with people, doing jobs in the neighbourhood, going out to collect photographs or tape-recordings or samples or to make drawings of something that's outside the school. And then sometimes weeks in the country, or even weeks abroad. Now all that I think is familiar to many of you for several reasons. I want to leave it at that because I do need to have it in the background as a theatre of operations for any campaign which we might get involved in planning together.

Now, for my particular campaign this morning, one arising from a sense that learning depends a great deal upon language. I want to ask, "How do people learn, when there's nobody there to teach them?" I ask this, not as a subversive plot to get rid of teachers, but to find out something about learning. "How do people learn, when there's nobody there to teach them?" My primary answer is, "by talking." If you want concrete evidence of this, perhaps this conference itself might serve as an example.

But let's take it slowly. Our view of learning depends upon our view of language. Our view of language depends upon our view of man. I take as my very general starting point a quotation from the philosopher Ernst Cassirer:

> Reason is a very inadequate term with which to comprehend the forms of man's cultural life in all their richness and variety. But all these forms are symbolic forms. Hence, instead of defining man as "animal rationale" we should define him as "animal symbolicum." By so doing, we can designate his specific difference, and we can understand the new way open to man - the way to civilization.

That has spread the canvas pretty wide. My job now is to narrow it. Putting it very crudely, oversimplifying Cassirer's view, let us say that we act in the real world by means of a representation. We construct a representation of the world for ourselves, and we act in the real world via that representation. What is happening, happens even while we react to it, and is lost, but the representation goes on. And we may work upon it. By that means, we gain a retrospect, and prophesying on the basis of that retrospect, we gain also a prospect. You may remember that Yeats said, not of man, but of animals, "Nor dread, nor hope attend a dying animal." Man, on the other hand, creates a prospect and a retrospect by symbolising experience to himself.

Now what I've just said is one way of interpreting human behaviour. As such, it is an example of itself. It constitutes one way of representing human behaviour, and there are other ways. Again, staying at the crude level, if I make a map of a district I'm staying in, I am, very briefly, representing my experiences of the countryside. But I might also be seen to be setting forth the expectations I should entertain of this countryside when next I visit it, and by which I shall travel intelligently in the area. Now, if you make that even cruder, by supposing that that map is in my mind, and by supposing that I modify it in the light of what I find continually, then you have a very rough picture of the theory of representation, the theory by which Cassirer calls man, <u>animal symbolicum</u>. My representation of the world differs from yours, not only because experience uses us differently, but also because my way of representing what happens to us is different from your way of representing it. I am not a camera. I partly act in the way a camera does, because my representation reflects what is in the outside world, to some degree. There is a drawing in, as a camera does, an introjection of what is outside. But there is also <u>my way</u> of representing it, which is different from yours. And that is not an introjection but a projection. If you can imagine a screen upon which is drawn a representation of the outside world, but the picture is a result not simply of what is drawn in, but also of what is projected. <u>My way</u> of representing the world, reflects, in other words, my inner self, my feelings, and so on.

We construct each our own representation of the world, but we work upon each other's. The fact that a representation has duration in time not only enables us to work upon it ourselves, but also to have other people work upon it. Martin Buber, the Israeli educationist, lecturing in London many years ago, took as his text, "Experience comes to man as 'I', but it is by experience as 'We' that he builds the common world in which he lives."

Secondly, we improvise upon our representation. We can do that with a strict eye upon prediction, as we might do if we talked to a man whose job we were going to take over - finding out what the job was like, casing the joint, with a very keen eye upon prediction. Or we may improvise freely, wildly, light-heartedly, with no concern for what our improvisation has to say about actuality. One simple example of that is the child who delights to think that all the earth <u>might</u> be paper and all the sea might be ink.

Experience comes to the small boy as "I," but what he makes of it is very much affected by what his mother says when he tells her all about it. And so I've come at last to language, and it's time I did. Some of you may also suspect I am now going to quote Sapir. Having arrived at language, what better linguist to illustrate the point I'm

after than Edward Sapir, the father of American linguistics, the father perhaps of modern linguistics? Edward Sapir says, "The primary function of language is generally said to be communication." But he demurs at this, and goes on to say, "It is best to admit that language is primarily a focal actualization of the tendency to see realities symbolically." And he gives a gloss on that elsewhere, "an actualization in terms of vocal expression of a tendency to master reality, not by direct and ad hoc handling of this element, but by the reduction of experience to familiar form." So language, Sapir says, is one way among others of representing the experienced world. But it is a key way. And here I want to draw, not only upon the ideas of Sapir but also upon the work of the Russian psychologists, Vygotsky and Luria. Although language is only one way of representing experience, it is a key way of doing so. It is, to put it very simply, the most explicit way. You can't imagine in fact any better way of following unseen events than listening to a running commentary in words, because language relates to events in an explicit, direct fashion.

Now, language gains this power because of its own complex internal organization. Putting the matter very briefly language is, in the first place, a means of classifying. I'm sure many of you will be familiar with Bruner's classic example of the need to classify in language, when he points out there are seven million distinguishable colours. If you take everything into consideration, shade and density and so on, there are seven million occasions upon which the human eye can indicate "this is different from that." And yet we cover our colour business of the day mainly in terms of seven or eight quite simple words. We've classified thousands of distinguishable phenomena into each of those huge categories. These are not the only categories language has, however, these categories of synonymity. It also has hierarchical categories, which a child learns quite early. For the young child, buttercup and flower are at first two names for the same thing. But quite early, it becomes clear that flower is hierarchically at a different level from buttercup; that both buttercups and daisies (although they're not daisies and buttercups) are both flowers. Then there is the relation of oppositeness, which we also learn very early in language. Light and dark, and light and heavy. Such pairs are not random associations, they are a part of the structure of language. We use them systematically: so that I may ordinarily ask, "How heavy is your suitcase?" but I don't ordinarily ask, "How light is your suitcase?" The words light and heavy are a pair, operating according to rules. And then, of course, there are the grammatical relations, in which, by formal distinctions in language, we can reflect some of the forms that we perceive or conceive of in our experiences. So, summing that up, language provides us with a grid, and we place this grid upon experience in order to reduce its irreducible

nature, in order to make order out of the uniqueness of every phenomenon.

All our experience is so saturated with verbalism that we find it difficult to stand back from language and see it operating. Let me, therefore, take a very crude example. Here is a 9 year old girl in a Yorkshire school, a girl called Christine, writing about her family:

My Brothers

> My brothers names are called Bert and John. On Monday my brother Bert was watching Wagon Train on the television. My brothers are I are off school with very bad colds. While Bert was watching the television, he had a tiddlywink in his hand, and he put it up his nose. Bert came across to mummy and told her what he'd done, and my mummy tried to reach it with her tweezers, but my brother was scared, and he sniffed, and the tiddlywink vanished out of sight. Daddy was putting his coat on by this time to take Bert to our doctor, who's called Dr. Fine. I was scared, and I cried, because I thought it might do some harm. My brother John just sat there watching TV. Besides, it was my tiddlywink out of my game. Doctor Fine got it out with tweezers. He came home all right, still I never got my tiddlywink.

I think the miracle by which we can get into the mind of a small child a long way away is difficult for us to comment upon, but at the crude level, I think we can feel the shape of that experience - the tug of war between the good little girl who cares about her brother, and the understandable little girl who cares about her tiddlywink. I am not suggesting that this is evidence that that child has perceived the shape. I want to suggest more than that. That this is, in fact, the act of perceiving the shape for her. The shape was perceived, as far as she will perceive it, as she wrote those words.

We use language, then, to structure experience, to give shape to experience. I like "structure" better than "give shape," because structure as a noun has two senses; it means the shape we find in things, and also the shape we give to things. And I want those two uses to be imported into the verb. When I say "we structure experience," I want that to refer both to the shape we give and the shape we find. These are, as you'll see, the processes of projection and introjection, which I started with.

Linguists sometimes distinguish two general categories of speech, the first being speech used as an exchangeable component of behaviour,

one of the counters of behaviour. If I say to you, "Lend me a dollar," (to take an example from Sapir) you may reply by action, or action and words, or words. And, in any case, structurally (not functionally, because I may in one case have the dollar and not in the other), structurally the various kinds of response are similar. Language and action are substituting for each other. The other category is one that is sometimes called "displaced speech," and this is language used to go back over the event, and tell about it in the way I've told about it. In both these cases, we structure experience. We use language to marshall our energies, our attentions, to structure the situation, as we act in the situation. But it is a typical use of language and the one which I want to put the stress on, that we also structure experience by using language to go back over it.

Having said that, I want to make yet another and different distinction. Imagine a party. And the party is over. And you're discussing the behaviour of the guests, in order to try and work out who it might have been who lost a piece of jewelry in one of the chairs. You're doing something useful. You're taking part, in a very general way, in the world's work. I want to call that "participating" and your talk, language in the role of participant. But I'm sure you'll find as you do this that the talk drifts into another vein. You begin to discuss the behaviour of the guests in order to enjoy their behaviour, and to savour it in a way you couldn't when they were actually behaving. Now, this is not being useful to anybody, but it's very enjoyable. This I want to call language in the role of spectator. You are not now participating in the world's work in any way, you are in the role of spectator, going back over past experience. I may go back over my experience, either as participant or as spectator. I may tell you what has been happening to me in order to work up to asking you to lend me a dollar. If that is so, I am pursuing my own ends, and this is part of the world's work. I am a participant. Again, I may go back over my experiences in order to influence your decision about your own affairs. If action and decision are involved in it, that is participation. But I may go back over my experiences to enjoy them again and to invite you to enjoy them with me. And in that case, I'm in the role of spectator, and you, in responding to me, are also in the role of spectator - spectator of my past experience.

Let me illustrate this with a very fine point. You may take it or leave it. If it isn't helpful, leave it. A six year old, in an infant school, took a piece of brown chalk to his drawing book and scribbled all over one page very vigorously. And then at the bottom he wrote,

"Exploring the rocks,
a place called Cromer" - (that's a very well know seaside holiday place)

- "Exploring the rocks
a place called Cromer
I knocked the loose lumps of mud."

Well, the teacher liked that. But she liked it better when she had made a few "improvements" - just very small improvements, with her red pen. It became "Exploring the rocks at a place called Cromer, I knocked the loose lumps of mud." Now, the fine point I want to make is to suggest that what the boy was really doing with his words was exactly what he was doing with his chalk. He was going back in order to gloat over his holiday, to enjoy it, and insofar as the teacher was concerned, it was saying to the teacher, "Here you are, you can share this pleasure with me." What the teacher made it into, was a piece of information. The boy then told anybody who wished to read it this piece of information about his holiday. In other words, as a way of informing, this was language in a participant role, whereas it had been written in a spectator role.

You will notice that we have seen people taking up the role of spectator of other people's lives, something we habitually do, whenever we gossip to people, and also whenever we read fiction. We become spectators of other men's lives. We do this habitually, for fun: to gloat over an experience, to extend our experience, to speculate upon the shapes experience could take. We do it for fun, which means because we never cease to long for more lives than the one we've got. As participants we have one life to live; as spectators, an infinite number is open to us.

But we also do it for a different reason. And here I want to go back to the structuring process. You build your internal picture of the world and as you move to new experiences, you have to modify it in the light of the changes you encounter. If the changes are not too great, if what happens is not too unexpected, you will adjust in your stride. But if what happens is unexpected beyond a certain degree, either pleasantly or unpleasantly, then you may not be able to adjust in your stride. You have to participate as best you can because events don't wait for you. And when it is over, you are left in a state of mental indigestion. You need then to go back over the experience, in some form or other, in order to come to terms with it. We may do this in thinking, but nine times out of ten, at some stage or other, if we are able to, we do it in talking. And, of course, we sometimes do it in writing. Piaget shows that children use their make-believe play for a similar purpose. They go back over experiences which seem too difficult to accept, and play through them. Part of the play is talk about their experiences, of the kind I have been describing, talk in the role of spectator. Piaget calls this play a "dominance of assimilation over accommodation." Now in my cruder terms, this is simply a "domination of projection

over introjection." In going back over events in order to come to terms with them, we are stressing our own inner need to project, to make the picture in the light of our own desires, what we can accept; and understressing the actuality of what was there.

To be in the role of spectator as opposed to participant is to be free from the need to act and to decide. I want now to suggest two ways in which, as spectators, we use the freedom given to us. We use it, in the first place, to attend to the forms of the language. And that means the linguistic forms themselves, the sounds, the rhythms, the structures. But also, the form of the events represented, and this is particularly important to us, of course, in the stories we tell and the stories we read. And thirdly, and perhaps most important, the form of the feelings, the patterns of feelings embodied and expressed. In participant situations, feeling usually moves directly into action - it either sparks off action, or is eked out in anxiety. But, as spectators, we are free to savour it as feeling. And however miserable, or even threatening, or frightening your day's adventure may have been, you will enjoy those hairbreadth escapes in talking about them afterwards - in a way you certainly could not while you were a participant. Children respond to the sounds of language, the audible forms of language; a nice story was told at Dartmouth of the conference of psychologists, at the end of which one member was collected by his wife and small child. The small child danced through the room chanting to himself, "maximum capacity, maximum capacity." That they could also appreciate the shape of events at a quite early age is illustrated by the three year old who called Cinderella "a bit sad book about two ugly sisters and the girl they were ugly to."

Attention to forms then is one way in which we use this freedom. Secondly, we use it in order to evaluate experiences more amply than we are able to do as participants. We evaluate the situations that we participate in, and we act in the light of our evaluation. But we tend to do so under the urgency of practical necessity. As spectators, we are free to refer more fully, to a broader frame of reference. D. W. Harding, the English psychologist, has put this point. I quote his words: "Detached and distanced evaluation is sometimes sharper for avoiding the blurrings and bufferings that participant action brings. And the spectator often sees the event in a broader context than the participant can tolerate." And his conclusion to that is, "to obliterate the effects on the man of the occasions on which he was an onlooker, would be profoundly to alter his outlook and values."

Speech in the role of spectator then, may be make-believe play, improvised drama, drama (in which the speech has brought with it the action in which it originally took place, or is supposed to have taken place). When it is not so imbedded, I don't know what to call it: the

nearest I can get to it is the word "gossip." We have done so little work on the social and educational functions of speech that we have no terms by which to distinguish good speech, desirable speech, from undesirable speech, and so on. When we go back over events, talking in the role of spectator, I want to call that "gossip," but using the word in a somewhat broader sense than normally, and intending a kind of talk that is not usually malicious. When we come to the written language in the role of spectator, I want to call that "literature." This is to define literature in an unusual way, a non-normative way. In most of our definitions of literature we have to think of things being good enough to be literature, and so something which is not good enough to be literature, is something else, but what it is nobody ever says. If I define literature as the written language in the role of spectator, this enables me to talk about the literature children write, as well as the literature children read. And those of you who have your university courses still fresh in mind, may take the point that it enables us to treat literature as something we do, not simply something other people have done. So what poets write (taking poets just for the moment to stand for literature more generally), what poets write, and what children write perform a similar function. Their writings are valid for the same reason. They are both adjustments to, improvisations upon the writer's representation of the world. But now bring the reader in. When the reader reads what somebody else has written in the role of spectator, he has to make his adjustments to his own experience, his improvisations upon his own experience. And he does so in the terms that the writer has laid down. When I read what a child writes, I am less likely to find myself adjusting sharply my own experiences, than I am when I read what a poet writes. In other words, a child's poem is valid for the same reason as a poet's, but is less influential than a poet's poem. I want very briefly to add a word on this. The pattern of attitudes, beliefs, ways of feeling and behaving that forms an important part of our pattern of culture, has been derived, above all, from the adjustments to experience, the improvisations upon their representations, made by the most sensitive adjustors in our society - by the artists. (We are talking of literature, so I'm thinking of the poets and the novelists, but it's obviously broader than this.) Our pattern of culture is in part derived from their adjustments and responses, but then only when we have given currency to those adjustments by our response to their works. And that's a very hurried way of saying that language in the role of spectator has a highly important cultural and educational function to perform.

Let us now turn to the way a young child acquires language. If we can form some conception of the purposes his language serves before he comes to school, we shall have surely the best starting point for anything we want to say about language in school. Listening comes first, but don't let us think of this as mere exposure. It is highly ac-

tive and directed listening. The child is no more a pick-up than he is a camera. His first speaking is derived from the conversational exchange he has heard going on around him. He tends to say, in a situation, what has been said by somebody else in that situation. Thus, it is social interchange that he learns first. But very soon, as Vygotsky points out, he comes to use this social speech also for another purpose while at the same time going on developing his power to converse. He begins to use language, then, as a kind of running commentary on what he is doing, and this continues whether anyone is listening or not. Vygotsky calls this "speech for oneself," and shows how, as this is established, language begins to develop in two different forms. The social speech becomes more complex, more adequate. The speech for oneself becomes, first, more abbreviated: after all, if you're speaking for your own purposes, you don't need to tell yourself so much about it, you can leave the subject out, and maybe even leave part of the predicate out too and so on. Secondly, it becomes "individuated," using words with special, private meanings. Finally, Vygotsky suggests that at about the age of six or seven, this abbreviated speech for oneself becomes internalised, silent. Further, that it is in fact going on still, in us, as verbal thinking. There is, of course, plenty of evidence to connect intelligence in its widest sense, in later life, with talking experience in infancy.

A child learns to speak not simply by imitation, but again (using this favourite word of mine) by improvisation. It soon becomes clear that he is applying a system. He doesn't know a system exists, and he's certainly never tried to learn it. But he is, in fact, acquiring it in the course of his speaking - a fact we can deduce by the errors he makes in applying it. I heard a small girl once say to her mother, "We better cross here, bettern't we?" If you know your Chomsky, you'll know that the transformations by which you derive that negative tag of "bettern't we," are very, very complex. Well, the child's got them dead right: it just happens that "better" isn't the kind of word that ought to be submitted to that particular transformation.

In the first year of speaking, speech remains mainly tied to the here and now; language about things present or actions going on. Then the child discovers the possibility of using words about things not present. And this is a tremendous extension of his powers to explore the world in language. He can then use what the Russians call "narrative speech," which is going back over experiences, shaping them, interpreting them. And "planning speech," which is putting the narrative into the future. And the Russians suggest that the child's ability to say what he is going to do is some influence in helping him to overcome distractions, and in fact, complete the plan. So there seems to be an important interpretative role in narrative speech, and an additional role, a regulatory role, in planning speech. To put this

another way: when a child uses words instead of things, and not simply as attributes of things, he is able to place new experience alongside the old and familiar and so relate it, accommodate to it, understand it.

Two allied purposes are served by language at this pre-school stage. First of all, it serves the child's curiosity. Here I need to digress a little in order to talk about George Kelly. George Kelly is an American psychologist who fires me a good deal, but I don't find him talked about very much in educational circles. It seems to me that George Kelly's Psychology of Personal Constructs gives us the ideal background for all I've wanted to say, and a great deal more that educators talk about. His conception that man is, above all, a predictor, that he generates expectations, puts them to the test, and modifies them in the light of what happens - this gives us a model of man which makes all behaviour, basically, similar to learning behaviour. If throughout our waking lives we actively generate expectations, it is as though we were transmitting a carrier wave, and as though incoming messages were modulations of that carrier wave when it meets the outside world. This is an active conception of living and learning. I have digressed, but not as fully perhaps as is necessary. Let me leave that as a matter for discussion. Meanwhile, I bring the point in now to explain that I assume the young child in ordinary circumstances is a curious animal; that it has curiosity, and that if language serves that curiosity, it will be felt by the child to be serving his purposes.

Secondly, obviously, a child uses language to build up relations with the rest of his family. And since the family is the whole theatre of operations for him, greater participation in the activities of the family provides a basic incentive for him.

When the child comes to school, it seems to me the least we can do is to make sure that his language goes on doing for him what it has done so far: and at all costs avoid anything in our behaviour which would bring discredit in his own eyes, in his own ears, upon his own speech. So the first important thing to decide about school is that the talk must go on. (I think future generations will condemn our system for this more than for anything else, that knowing something about the importance of talk, we nevertheless organize our timetable in such a way that we banish it into the crannies between other items.)

Further, talking and doing must go on together. Speech rooted in the here-and-now is still an important aspect of language development. If language is to have value as currency later on in handling second hand experience, secondary experience, it must, in these early stages, grow very firm roots in first hand experience: which means that talking and doing will be closely interlocked. I think the tempta-

tion to neglect this necessity is greatest in what is sometimes miscalled a knowledge subject. We have to bear in mind here that a child must formulate from bits of his own environment, in order to generate the hypothesis by which he can make something of what we can tell him. What we know, as has been pointed out, is often a great help to the child, and we must therefore tell him in the right circumstances; the right circumstances include that what we can give him fits into a framework that is already there for it. That framework consists of appropriate "expectations," and the generating of the expectations begins with the child trying to make something of what is there for him in the environment.

I think writing begins with what Sapir called the "expressive use of language," the verbal expression of the writer's own awareness - ~~a kind of self-verbalizing~~. But under different kinds of pressure, it moves out from that central position near to the self, either on the one hand to referential writing in the role of participant, or to poetic writing in the role of spectator. And I think that most of what we get in the elementary school is, in fact, still transitional, still in the course of moving from the expressive towards the referential and towards the poetic. A great deal of learning is inhibited by teachers who don't know that if they cut off those expressive roots of language, they are short-circuiting the learning process.

A child's expressive, poetic writing in school leads on to literature. After all, if we define it as I have done, they are parts of one activity; the writing and the reading are there for the same reason. But of course this may not work. It may not work, because of the existence of sub-cultures, groups so culturally different from what it is we are offering in the way of written literature, that no contact can be made. I think, then, a teacher simply has to build up his own repertoire of what the children shall read, and it will be derived from what they have written, what other children have written, and from what people in their own group write. And as time goes on, he will hope to bring into this something from the wider context, the wider spectrum, where it is nearest to what is already built up there in the repertoire. This is becoming a more acute problem in England, but I can't claim it's a new one. I was very interested to find reference to it in a writing by Dover Wilson. You may know Dover Wilson as a Shakespearean critic - he certainly was a "literary gent," but he was also an Inspector of Schools. In 1921 he was criticizing another "literary gent" who was also an Inspector of Schools, Matthew Arnold, and he attacked Matthew Arnold's view of literature in these words: "Culture is not a hot house growth, an exotic plant, from which cuttings may be taken for the window boxes and back gardens of the less fortunate. Culture means cultivation - cultivation of the common soil of the human spirit, and the flower and fruit which spring from it grow

naturally from that soil." This indicates a long term objective, raises all kinds of difficulties I can't solve, but that it's facing in the right direction, I have no doubt.

Surveying these activities, then, how do we select, how do we plan? You've heard it said a thousand times that children's interests must be the arbiter. Let's take a brief look at that. D.O. Hebb, the Canadian psychologist, has pointed out that what attracts our attention is likely to be something which has a familiar element, and an unfamiliar element. Piaget, in a very much narrower context, looking at what a small baby will imitate, finds that they will tend to imitate actions which have something familiar about them, and something unfamiliar about them. So what straddles the familiar and the unfamiliar will tend to attract attention. If we look at interests in that way, it is what can interest a child that concerns us and the restriction is on starting points, but not on destinations. The first implication is that teachers must have the freedom to choose how they structure the environment for the children, what materials they bring in. And the second implication is that teachers must use that freedom to give children the freedom to choose amongst what is provided. Teaching is not laying siege and battering away from the outside; you must have a traitor within the gates who will open the door. (Herbert Kohl showed this magnificently in his Teaching the Unteachable.) If learning means going through a door, the door is only opened from the inside. And once it's opened, we depend upon the effectiveness of the learning processes in the child's own view. It is encouraging to think what a massive task an infant has accomplished when he has learned to speak. As I say, the family is the whole theatre of operations for the child, so that fuller participation in family affairs brings with it the whole "satisfaction of progress." Similarly, the use of language in school can bring this sense of satisfaction. It enters in to organize so many other kinds of activity, from the most mechanical manipulation of things to the making of myths: language spreads out the elements and enables us to make our own way with them. It is a cumulative process, a geometric progression. If we can get it started, the increase is rapid enough in most cases to give the child the sense that this learning process is worth opening the door for.

But of course there are problems in getting it started, because we're not always dealing with children who've come from ordinary situations. Ordinary curiosity may have been blunted, and apathy set in, or perhaps apathy sets in towards the school and what the teachers are interested in. Again, Herbert Kohl shows magnificently that it can be a tough job, but you can work for, and get, the breakthrough. And alternative theories based upon a body of knowledge and sufficient incentives, positive and negative, to get the body of knowledge learned, just don't hold water for me in this sort of situation. We can get away with

them elsewhere because they can act as a priming of the pump, but they're just simply non-starters here. A body of knowledge is only of value as a frame of reference, a frame of reference is only of use to anybody if, in fact, he refers, if a process of referring goes on. And the process of referring only goes on if there is some activity afoot which demands the reference.

All I've said has implication for training because if we want teachers to educate children in this way, we have to educate teachers in this way also. I want to say a very little about training, and very briefly. A student teachers has two massive jobs on hand. The first is practical; he has to find his own way as a teacher, his own role, his own personality. Teachers, as you know, above all, have to be themselves. And the student has to find himself in order to be himself. This may involve a great deal of experiment, a great deal of patience on the part of those around him, a great deal of anxiety sometimes on his part. The second job is to put in some hard thinking and serious study. If we put before him material which has no intellectual challenge, we lose out from the start. But my main point is to say these two tasks must be made one. He is not able to tackle educational theories until he has experience of educational practice, the confrontation of the classroom. He has to structure his environment, to make his own hypotheses, in order to match them up against the educational theories that people like ourselves proliferate.

I think all teachers need to know about language as a means of learning, as one of the things they understand about children. I think the college community must teach them this. Our own teaching must be mainly by talking, and the talking must not all be too studious, it must fringe off into more relaxed and more social talking. And it must fringe off also into active talking and doing, where the groups that have been talking with you will undertake some joint enterprise which brings other kinds of talking into play. The writing we ask for must be not only studious, but also personal. We need an openness between the generations, which comes when personal talking and writing are a part of the climate in which we live. And we need an environment of artifacts, just as the children had in the primary schools - to be surrounded with things that the children have produced, that we have produced, that the students have produced, seen in the same context.

I think teacher training has often suffered in the past by not having the right relations between the two branches of the profession. Students are tenants of our lasting relations with teachers in schools, and if we fail with the teachers, we fail with the students. I believe that the further education of experienced teachers ought to be closely related with the initial training of student teachers, because I believe

the teaching situation, when it is rightly handled, becomes a way of setting up warm and egalitarian relationships, and not a way of inhibiting them. If I may be permitted to say so, I think it is difficult for the right relations to exist if teacher educators and teachers come through different routes, or from different stables. Where this is so, I think you need boxing and coxing. I think the educator of teachers needs the daily confrontation in the classroom, in order to have some things in his blood which can't be got by any other means; and in order to see educational perspectives from that viewpoint.

And that leads me to my very last point, which is to revert to language. And this is a disclaimer, if you like. There always will be a gap between anything we can formulate in language and the actuality of any situation. Eleanor Duckworth showed us this morning that there's a gap, there's a difference between believing and stating. There's a difference between response to a situation, and any formulation we might make of that situation in language. Confrontation involves responses we could not formulate, so that Piaget spoke of the present moment as "the manifold and irreducible present." If a sense of touch can be taken as an image of the fully sensitive response to a confrontation, then language is like the bones of the hand. It is the bones of the hand, and the arm and the body, which enable touch to be delicately and deliberately applied. But touch is always far more than the impact of bone.

What I've been doing this morning is what I've found myself doing increasingly in recent years - trying to explain to myself what it is I <u>feel</u> and <u>believe</u> about language, and about children, and about learning. In this respect, it is the homespun philosophy, or the counterpart of the homespun philosophy I began with. And it is important, in thinking about language and learning, finally to come up against this disclaimer. Formulating a belief into a policy, and then acting on the formulation, may mean that we hide behind our formulation, and so refuse the responsibility that the actual confrontation presents. I have a magnificent, but long, quotation from George Kelly which puts that point rather better, but you've had to take my brief word in place of his.

Critique

William Iverson
Stanford School of Education

I begin on a note of inspiration; I will be brief. "To be concerned with language, as it is used by living people, is to bring us to the heart of things human. Try, if you will, to think of human existence bereft of speech. Imagine this world, within the next ten minutes, rendered dumb and mute and wordless. Without language, life suddenly takes on a humanless garb. Without language, written and spoken, the silence of the day would be broken only by shadowy forms, primitive cries and grunts, the sounds of the winds and the waves, the rustle and murmur of moving things. Language is the unique ingredient in man. For where it does not exist, there abides little that is human." That statement was made by Irving Lee, not by Jimmy Britton; the statement seems to me to sum up the spirit of Mr. Britton's remarks. There was, in Mr. Britton's remarks, a pervading sense of the humane--a call to all of us who work with children, to lift language to the place where the lives of the young are really enlarged by the language which they hear and are encouraged to use. It is clear that Mr. Britton does not believe that all of our efforts in the past have been enlarging ones. Obviously, he regards some of what we do as pretty constricting.

What does Professor Britton regard as enlarging? And what constricting? Let me make a representation of his position before I comment upon it.

Certainly, Mr. Britton has strong views about the constricting qualities of "knowledge peddling"; given his British and academic background, that might have come as a shock to me (as it may have come as a shock to you today) had I not read John Dixon's report on the Dartmouth Seminar last summer. That seminar gathered together about fifty Americans and Britishers, including Professor Britton, all of them concerned in one way or another, with the teaching of English. That report reveals that the treatment of the mother tongue is neither in the British nor in the American classroom what it once was. I quote from the report:

> With regard to knowledge, the two delegations /i.e. those from the U.S. and those from Great Britain/ passed each other in mid-Atlantic, as Nelson Francis remarked. In the United Kingdom a break away from the constrictions of

> the traditional has recently given new emphasis to experience, and to the operational use of language to handle, order, and to come to terms with it. After the initial shock of hearing this from British lips, there was some United States sympathy with this view. Increasingly in the United States there have been danger signs of examinations shaping courses of study, college board examinations, standardized examinations given regularly throughout the school, advanced placement tests for the able, and now the threat of a national assessment. On the other hand, the prevailing American concern seems to be with the danger at the other extreme of a chaotic approach to operational English, associated with a child-centered curriculum--in which the major concern is social adjustment, and not a child's growth in intellectual, imaginative and linguistic power." (Growth Through English, p. 72.)

Now that puts the issue squarely. I'm confident that the issue did not escape your attention in your several groups. The issue is all the sharper because we have just finished one stage in a nation-wide re-examination of the English curriculum in this country through the various Projects English. In general, that re-examination seemed to conclude, in my judgment, that more knowledge peddling was in order, not less. The curricular plans of the Projects English and related projects have yet to be tested in any comprehensive way in our schools; I suppose that we must wonder if we are ready to reject them before they have been tried. Perhaps I should put the question in another way: "Can we find some middle way, which permits us to retain a genuine concern for the personal and social adjustment of children while we also retain a devotion to English as a discipline?" Perhaps the rapprochement can be achieved if we take Professor Britton's view of language seriously. You will remember that Professor Britton asserts that we use language to represent reality to ourselves and that this representation provides both for a looking back on an experience and a looking forward--a retrospect and a prospect. In looking forward, we may wish to predict future events in the outer world (in that case we attend closely to what has been introjected by the outer world). Or we may not wish to be confined by what is likely to occur in the outer world; in that case, we do not attend as closely to what has been introjected but, instead, we project our own fancies upon an imaginary outer world, expecting no outcome in the "real" outer world. We are affected, Britton said, in all of our efforts at representation by other people; what other people say and do modulates or forms the linguistic shapes which we give to experience. In all of our structuring and symbolizing of experience language is the tool which permits us to give order to experience--e. g. to classify phenomena. Language also facilitates the systematizing of relationships among classified phenomena and as we employ language

to represent, classify, and systematize experience, we may play in one of two roles. We may operate on reality in the participant role, or we may operate on the language in the spectator role: the participant role is pragmatic, whether the language is concerned with present or future action. The aim is to do something or to enlist support for doing something. The spectator role is primarily non-pragmatic: the aim is to savor, to enjoy, to reconcile, or to understand, but no action or decision about action is expected. The spectator role attends first to forms; to the patterns of events; to the forms of language, including its sounds; to the pattern of feelings that render an evaluation of the forms.

What are the educational implications of Professor Britton's view of language?

Let us begin with the infant in his family: an infant listens, he says, actively and with direction; he begins to speak in conversational interchange with his family, and then he extends his speaking as a kind of running commentary on what he's doing, without concern for the response he receives (this form of speech indicates that he is working with operating "a linguistic system", and not just imitating).[1] He quickly extends his commentary to past and future events, but first in a participant role; he may then adjust the linguistic constructs concerning the past and future which were originally built up through experience by means of later spectator activity--make-believe play and story telling. Thus, at the pre-school level, linguistic activity structures experience for the child in practical and contemplative contexts and establishes his various social relationships, especially those with his family.

The child moves to school: in the school, the opportunities for talking and doing, centered on the here and now, must, in Mr. Britton's view, be stressed: first hand experience in school must provide the primary impetus to talk, and the teacher's effort to develop the child's capacity for talk should build upon this first hand experience. The talk should also build up in the group its sense of social relationship--its sense that it is a group. The child's exploration of do with language in both the participant and in the spectator role can be encouraged by bringing to the child meaningful first-hand experience.

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[1] Editor's note: the distinction made here is reflected in the differing views of language-learning set forth by Chomsky and Skinner. Cf. Ruth Weir, Language in the Crib.

The child begins to write: when he begins to write, will be usually neither purely participant nor purely spectator; he will wish to be, in most of his writing, something between the two--expressive in Sapir's phrase--partially interested in experience and partially interested in his own language.

The child begins to read: reading is or should be, like listening, an active and directed process. That is, the child has expectations about events and about language and he modifies both sets of expectations in the light of what he reads and his experience of the reading act (I take it that this predictive work which the child does when he reads, this anticipation of what the language read will be or what the events described will be, can be anticipation either in the role of participant, and hence, pragmatic, or in the role of spectator, and hence, non-pragmatic). Of course, the child may not be engaged at all by what he reads and in that case, nothing happens. One way to engage the child trying to learn to read, when the cultural differences which separate him from the culture of the middle or dominant classes are sharp, is to use what students have written, or what others from their cultural group have written as the "material-to-be-read," aiming always toward obtaining from the children an increasingly broad spectrum of reading material.

To engage the child is to employ his interests, using the familiar to begin with and working toward the unfamiliar. Given all of language and what we know of children, we may take courage from the way a child normally learns language as he participates in family life. The normal in the family's development of a child's language does not always happen; then the progress which a child should know before he comes to school is replaced by failure at home and by the certainty of failure in school, whatever the handling of the mother tongue in the classroom. In that case, the first job in language teaching is to overcome the child's sense of being doomed and to accept, as Miriam Wilt and others have also said, to accept the youngster with his assets, however intractable those assets, to accept them fully. I have made this attempt to re-represent Mr. Britton's point of view about language in the classroom in order to tell you how I have understood him so that I might respond having specified what I understood to be the position to which I am responding. Of course, I may not have understood him.

Now, for me: I do not doubt that the schools need to care more about language, specifically about talk; Mr. Britton's phrase, "Talk is tucked in between the nooks and crannies of the curriculum," is an apt one. Talk, in our elementary schools, has always been an underprized activity. And I do not think that I could quarrel with Mr. Britton's representation of the importance of the structuring and symbolizing powers of language or with his distinction between the participant role and the spectator role in using language and many of the im-

plications which he drew out of that distinction.

Where do I quarrel then? My need for further discussion begins when I consider his urging of the necessity of direct experience as the basis for the development of a child's capacity to manage the language. I do not believe that direct experience bears an omnipresent relationship to language development in children; I need to know more about the boundaries and the proportions. I need to know "What was the repertoire of experience brought to the school by the children and how much we can use of this experience?" I need to know more about the requirement that talk begin with direct experience as it bears on the changing maturities of children; I need to know more about direct experience and the new technologies of communication. The very symbolizing and structuring powers of language surely ought not to keep language development, throughout the elementary school, in a one-to-one relationship with direct experience. Expecially do we need to be sensitive to the growing linguistic power of children and its changing character as we contemplate the lengthening elementary school program; we do have increasingly more "pre-school" activities. I include them under the rubric of the "lengthening elementary school program" here. Whether you wish to consider them part of elementary education or not is for you to decide; for me, these years are a part of elementary school. As we look at Mr. Britton's picture of the handling of the mother tongue in the classroom, we need to consider the fact that we do have a longer span in which to "develop the child's language." I don't think that it will ever shorten. It will get longer and longer. How, then, does the proportion of direction experience change over the years and dictated by what criteria? Further, what would linguists, psycholinguists, sociolinguists, and psychologists have to say about the relationship between the direct experience and language at the differing levels of development among children?

As I consider the use of talk about direct experience to develop a child's language, I need to know where the talk, and so the developing language, is going--how it will be employed. Two necessities, in Mr. Britton's view, need to be observed if we are to do right by the mother tongue in our schools. One necessity is defined in the United Kingdom's Newsome report; I quote: "The over-riding aim of English teaching must be the personal and social competence of the pupil"; the other necessity derives from the postulate that personal uses of language--expressive uses, to use Sapir's term--must precede literary, poetic, or presentational uses and also discursive, referential, or informational uses. Let me take these necessities one at a time.

The first necessity--that language training be directed to the personal and social development of children--brings us back to the problem of "knowledge peddling"; no one is going to oppose the aim of

enhancing the personal and social development of children under the auspices of education and its institutions. In America, our problem has always been--or so it seems to me--our problem has always been to find the best avenues for doing the enhancing; our problem has been "Who does what?" Which kinds of enhancing belong to the school, which to the family, which to other agencies? And when we have tried to foster a development of the child in the schools through ways which are outside of, or only tenuously related to, the traditional avenues furnished by the disciplines, we have always had, I think, difficulty in maintaining a sense of direction. Can we agree on "where we are tending," when we set personal, social development as a goal? Can we establish criteria to help us know when we are on course, when we have strayed? In the past, at least, we have had difficulty with these problems among many of our professional brethren. Concomitantly, in the past, a not inconsiderable proportion of the lay-patrons of the schools have not seemed very confident about the wisdom of our aims and the security of our sense of direction when we talked about personal, social development.

My consideration of the second necessity which Mr. Britton sets forth has to do with the priorities and sequence which this necessity seems to imply. Mr. Britton says, and I quote: "Most of the work throughout the elementary school will be neither objective, referential statement nor 'literature.' It will be transitional, between the expressive and those two poles. Teachers who are impatient on this account, may cut away the essential foundations for later linguistic development." To be fair, please do note the "may." Indeed, in another paper, Mr. Britton has acknowledged that, "there is need for research to see if any evidence can be found to support our belief that when we try to teach too early the language of impersonal affairs, we are not really taking a valuable shortcut, but we are short-circuiting." Would we not have to say that the evidence on this point would surely have to be quite persuasive? For, unless I misunderstand Professor Britton, he is suggesting deferring work aimed directly at the development of the child's capacity to manage language within such disciplines as literature, mathemetics, science, and social studies. Perhaps, to be more accurate, he may not be preposing deferring the work so much as treating it as transitional. Now, "treating work as transitional" would, of course, need to be defined. What would be the quality of this transitional work which would move the child and his language toward the separate disciplines? As I say, I do think the research would have to be quite persuasive on this point. When Mr. Britton discusses "interest," he seems to be saying that only in the more favorable cases, "where /the child's/ fear of failure or antipathy is /not/ acute can /the presentation of a/ body-of-knowledge work to generate interest, and then it appears to be just a priming of a pump." Would we not again have to have much more evidence on this point? Can interest be developed among children, in and through bodies of knowledge, even in the most unfavorable cases?

Or is this quite impossible?

Finally, I come to Professor Britton's specific suggestions for teacher education. I have no serious objection to what he proposes. I thought his proposals admirably stated--that teacher education be substantive; that school experience begin at the moment that educational theory is approached, and continue until the teacher in preparation is ready to go into the schools (that is to say, there should be no unleashing of theory upon the innocent young unless they have some counteracting confrontation, as he called it, in the classroom); that a close relationship be established between the professional and the novice; that a close relationship be created between the professional in the preparing institutions and the professional on the job; that sufficient classroom confrontation be required of the professional in the preparing institutions to allow him to know the responsibilities and the opportunities which exist in the schools.

Mr. Britton concluded his paper with admirable modesty. He assured us that his theories are only partial explanations. Partial they may be. They are illuminating, indeed.

Discussion

A. William Ward, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Group 10:

Two questions keep occurring to me as I consider the speeches of both of the speakers which I have heard today, that is Eleanor Duckworth and Jimmy Britton. I wish to address the questions to Jimmy Britton: One, given the present movement in the United States toward identifying or trying to identify terminal performance behaviors for schooling which are somehow related to the kinds of things that people are expected to do once they get out of school, given the effort to relate the experiences provided for youngsters to the eliciting of "terminal performance behaviors," how can you suggest such a free form of program? That is, will such a program as you suggest elicit the behavior in which we are interested?

Number two: what evidence do we have that teachers learn, from having a kid's "learning experience," how to teach kids?

Jimmy Britton: "Terminal performance": I think those were the words you used. I don't want to sound smug about "terminal performance" because I don't know a completely satisfactory answer to your question. But I do see the question of "terminal performance" as a question asked by people who view education in one way; the same question is, for people who view education in another way, a very difficult one. As I am one of those people who deal with education in "the other" way, your question is difficult for me. I don't think this means we ought not to try to resolve it, but I just think it does leave us the right to say, "Well, that isn't quite the way we frame the question." In other words, I think that it is relevant to say that if you adopt the idea that you can determine what children should know and be able to do when they reach the school-leaving age, you run into the problem which you describe; but it may well be--and there is evidence to suggest--that if you had not thought of the question in that way, you would have had surprising results with individual children who would have achieved great ability in directions that you hadn't laid down in your description of "minimum, essential, requirements." I'm happy with saying, "If you limit education to matters of 'What should children know at a certain stage?', I feel fairly strongly that you have not set educational objectives in a very helpful way.

I don't know whether the episode which I am about to elicit comes

from the past records of this Tri-University Project or not (I've been reading them recently). In any case, I read recently somewhere that it is suggested in France that every child in France should know the life story of Jeanne d'Arc. And every child is, therefore, taught the life story of Jeanne d'Arc; every adult, therefore, knows the life story of Jeanne d'Arc. Therefore, everyone in France knows the life story of Jeanne d'Arc, and no one in school is taught the life story of Jeanne d'Arc. I am giving an exaggerated picture of the kind of circularity to which any statements about "What every child should know" are likely to lead. If you begin, as I've begun, with studying the potential of language as a means of learning which can carry the child in the directions in which his interests takes him, then you see the tremendously high potential of what his interests may achieve in those directions. You still leave yourself with the problem of selecting the kinds of activities, and the kinds of environmental effects that you're going to provide for in school, but you also aim to open the school situation so that a great deal more than you ever planned for, is, in fact, part of what the child has contact with. And, therefore, an unforeseen development of interests and an unforeseen pursuit of knowledge is possible. I'm not against knowledge. This is the thing that's so difficult to say.

It is simply that knowledge is of value as you use it, and although you can make a beautifully tidy program of what a child "should know", you cannot make so beautifully tidy a program of how he should use it. And no program which you make can insure that he will use what he knows in this way, or that way, or the other way. Well, that seems to me to be not an answer, but my way of dealing with the question.

[Mr. Ward reframed the second question.]

Britton: I don't believe that teachers do learn from having the same experiences as those we provide to allow children to learn so I don't know what it was that I said that has raised this question. I don't believe that adults do learn in the same way as children; there is a continuity between an adult's and a child's learning, and as Eleanor Duckworth showed us this morning, some of the materials which will stimulate activity on the part of elementary school children can, in fact, also engage the attention of adults. There is this overlap; but, in general, Piaget surely does show that you have to go through a good many earlier stages before you arrive at the kind of response to experience that you're capable of as an adult. You may be referring to my point about teaching students who hope to teach in the way we hope that they'll teach children. But my point was a more restricted one than the one you're imputing to me; it has to do with way of teaching and attitudes, not with problems, materials or ways of thinking.

B. Nancy Modiano, New York University, Group 6:

I'm going to editorialize more this time; one of the questions to which we addressed ourselves was, "Is there an English curriculum? Should there be one?" Should English be taught as a subject or not? We spent much of the time talking about language and thought, and I hope members of Group Six who disagree with what Mr. Britton said or what I say will put into writing for the records of the conference, what they would like to say concerning our discussions of this morning.

I would like, at this time, to make a point concerning our discussions of this morning, and that is this: that many educators make the very serious error of confusing the Whorfian thesis, as it has been spelled out by Whorf and Sapir and many others, with Bernsteins' distortion of it. If the use of certain dialects and cognitive styles tends to be correlated with poor academic achievement, that does not mean that there is a causal relationship between the dialect or cognitive style and the achievement. Human language is very flexible. If an idea or a construct exists, any dialect can be shaped to express it. And the dialect we speak need not restrict us from such constructs.

C. Miriam Wilt, Temple University, Group 1:

I would like to describe three positions taken by people in our group:

The first one may be framed in a set of rhetorical questions, "What is a teacher to do who is presented with a page by page English course of study that is to be followed day by day?" "Is this a way to teach English?" "Why does this threat to our elementary school English program exist--the page-for-page curriculum?"

Second, some people said that they do not want to see our elementary schools become therapeutic centers for the preservation of the child's mental health. The English program should not be seen as a mental health program; but as an effort to understand past cultures and to understand the cultural patterns of the students and the language which they bring with them to the school. (I would like to say, here that, while we are looking for the first-hand experience, I think I'd like to put a plug in for Sybil Marshall's two books: the first one, An Experiment in Education, many of you may know; the second, concerning an experiment in teacher education, is called An Experiment in Creative Education. It describes how one does the very thing that many of you at the conference are concerned about doing; it describes how a person takes a group of adults and starts off their "learning" in the

English area. Miss Marshall started with poetry, as a matter of fact, and tried to go through the steps so that their students would understand how they learned, how they learned poetry and the arts generally and all the rest.)

Finally, let me say one thing related to Mr. Britton's report on English lower schools, and that is this: that with or without the day by day curriculum in English as presented in a textbook, the children in England write very, very well. They write because they have had many opportunities to talk, and the talk is tucked all around the things that they're doing. I have seen just as good writing in the United States; but I will say this, I haven't seen as much of it. English children are facile; they are easy with their speech; they are easy with their writing. There is much to be learned from a curriculum that does not follow the day to day book kind of English curriculum.

D. William Work, Speech Assocation, Group 5:

We had some difficulties in bridging the gap between our theoretical and our practical concerns; for example, what are the criteria which one ought to use in determining how far one goes in applying the principles of "self-discovery" and/or "discovery by the self"? How does one carry out his innovative impulses in the face of massive budget cutbacks? To what degree can one take a theory which emerges from one context, say England or the psychological laboratory, and try to apply it in another context? To what extent are Miss Duckworth's ideas applicable in the skills areas of the curriculum? To what degree are the implications of Mr. Britton's thinking peculiarly applicable in the British schools? We just don't know the answers to those kinds of questions. The fact that we, here, at this conference are, ourselves, in a learning situation and in a language-mediated situation, seems to have caused us to experience some difficulty distancing ourselves sufficiently for objective deliberation. In a sense, because we are doing what we are talking about, we have rendered ourselves self-conscious. Perhaps we are hung-up in our meta-learning. We are having difficulty in watching ourselves learn.

E. Robert Davis, Syracuse University, Group 7:

I'm asking you again to allow me to speak as a mathematician. I realize that it would be reasonable to imagine that the majority of the people here are interested in some aspect of English--reading, language, or whatever. I think that I can appropriately assume, then, that you know Herbert Kohl's book, Teaching the Unteachable.

I have three quick remarks.

First, when I first got into the "new math" business, one of the most exciting books I found was Mearns' Creative Power; it's actually about the teaching of poetry. Recently I found Herbert Kohl's book, again about the teaching of poetry; in both cases I was convinced that these books were also among the best statements I've seen about what one is trying to do with the new mathematics. There's something in the paradox of the usefulness of these books to a mathematician that needs to be understood; I don't fully understand it, but I'll offer this interpretation. It seems to me that in the cases of both books, the author is saying, "Children can write real poetry," and "they can understand real poetry, but they do not respond well to fake poetry." And what I wanted to say, in my work in mathematics, is that children can do real mathematics; they cannot do fake mathematics. That is, incidentally, one of the points made in Bruner's Process of Education.

Now if you will look at something like ninth grade algebra, as it has been traditionally taught, it is not real mathematics. It is about removing parentheses, and changing signs, and all sorts of things which are not mathematics. But the genuine actually works better than the fake.

My second remark follows closely. "Why have you got the fake, anyway?" And I think I won't try to answer that. We can think about that.

The third comment has to do with trends in curriculum reform: reform in English appears to me to be paralleling reform in math. The first wave of new mathematics appears to have been essentially "knowledge peddling"; various of us were against such "knowledge peddling" from the beginning, but our concerns were not heeded. And we seem now to be in the process of mounting a second "wave" of new mathematics. This second wave, intriguingly enough, draws its inspiration from advances that have been made in mathematics in England and represents a rejection of knowledge peddling and an emphasis on experience.

I'd like to try to give you a fairly clear picture of what English math is like: I visited classes in England--some of them have been recorded on films--looking at how language enters into the English math programs. A class of about thirty-nine children will typically be broken up into about thirteen groups of three each. The language used is language used among three children. If you come into a room, you would see essentially thirteen kids talking at any given time--one child in each of the groups. Each of the groups has a group task. The

children are talking all day long and not just in the cracks in the curriculum (or whatever the phrase is). After they've carried out whatever it is they are doing, they write up a little written report on what they have done. The use of language is intimately wedded to talk and reporting. In the United States I've often heard principals say, "I'm sorry that it is so noisy, it must be the day before Christmas, or something." Twice in England when I visited schools, the principal apologized to me and said, "I don't know what's wrong, it isn't usually this quiet."

F. Wes Sowards, Stanford University, Group 8:

Let me comment very briefly, so that you will know how one other sub-group reacted to Mr. Britton's comments. There's a commonality among the reactions that is beginning to develop that is very interesting; our group, I would say, enjoyed Mr. Britton's comments very much. They found the idea of freeing children through language intriguing, attractive, easy to embrace. But the direction in which our discussion moved rather quickly was the direction of trying to consider what is a reasonable, necessary, efficient, useful balance between forces which produce constraint and forces which allow for variety in elementary education and yet allow one to get the job done.

Our group went back again to look from the perspective of history at the problem of understanding what decisions is it legitimate and necessary that teachers make, what decisions is it legitimate and necessary that pupils make, and what decisions is it legitimate and necessary that school systems make, responding to the community that supports the school, and so on. We had two or three people in our group that had had rather extended experiences in England; they gave very positive testimony of the kind that Bob Davis just gave about what is being accomplished in England. I think in all fairness, or to complete the record, I should say that on the way down, in the elevator, I discovered what I'll call sort of a silent center in our group, a group that seemed through its silence to say, "It just can't be all that good in England; those guys saw the good schools, there just have to be some reading problems in England." There was one person in our group that suggested that there just didn't seem to be any reading problems in England; there seems to be no need for remedial reading teachers there. Where the truth lies, I am not sure.

G. Dorothy Seaburg, Northern Illinois University, Group 3:

Perhaps Mr. Britton would like to comment to some of these questions and perhaps not:

Question 1. Is there some differentiation that should be made in the language training of teachers at various grade levels?

Question 2. Should grade levels be abolished?

Question 3. Should we be aiming at specialization in preparation of teachers?

Question 4. What is the role of language in the life of the child at different stages of his development?

Britton: First, as to language training, let me begin with language and linguistics: I would think that training in this area would be more important for teachers of some subjects than for teachers of other subjects. We feel, at the moment, that if we can get a school to have a staff meeting dedicated to providing a language policy for the school, so that things like the role of discussion, the role of talk, the way in which notes are made, in science lessons and in history lessons, and so on can be discussed, we are lucky. If there can be some common exchange of ideas and a common policy agreed upon in a school--even if it isn't the best policy--things will become better. The policy will be more consistent, and by being more consistent, it will be better than what is.

Second, levels and tracks: I can't differentiate the kind of knowledge about language that teachers ought to have by looking at the levels or tracks or grades which they teach. Teachers at all levels ought to know something about the language.

If by "the levels," you mean streams or tracks, I would take refuge under your question about tracking. I think that the best work in English schools is going on where we have mixed ability groupings and not streams or tracks. I feel very strongly about this. I know that mixing abilities increased the teacher's difficulties initially, but it does lead to better progress in the end--soon enough for the objections to it to be quietened quite quickly. I know a large number of schools where teachers have managed to get unstreaming, or untracking, you would call it, put into practice; and in the course of the first year of doing so, I'm sure they haven't solved the problems, but they've gone sufficiently far to feel confident that it was a right task to set themselves.

Third, specialization: can I take up a point that Professor Iverson made here? Simply, a matter of clarification. Yes, of course, I believe in having teachers who are qualified in a particular direction teach children in that specialist area. And I think that if your elemen-

tary education goes up to thirteen, that thirteen isn't, obviously, too early for specialization in a particular direction to be beginning to operate. Children of thirteen need more help if they are actively engaged in something that concerns them than can be given on all subjects by any teacher. I think that I have been guilty of giving a wrong impression this morning because of the pendulum's swing toward emphasis upon the academic. I've taken too much for granted. Let me try to formulate my position with respect to specialization.

The idea that the kind of writing wanted in a history account is different from the writing wanted in writing which comes out of a science experiment or from that wanted in the writing of a story--this idea is terribly important to me. The forms of language required are so specifically different that I take it for granted that it is part of the science teacher's job to see that the kind of writing wanted in science--this handling of language--is learned in science lessons; the kind of language needed for history, learned in history lessons, etc. But the pendulum swing is such that I did not mention my interest in the language used in specialized areas. What I wanted to stress was, that if you want children to reach the linguistic abilities necessary to the "areas," you ought to respect what is likely to be the best route.

I agree entirely with Professor Iverson that more research is wanted before we know any route to be the best. Let me say that in three year's time I hope we shall have some evidence--this is one of the central problems that my own research is concerned with. What I gave you was a hypothesis based upon experience, but a good deal of experience and the experience of a good many people; let me give the example of a piece of writing I met with this summer at a conference in West Riding: a child had written, I think it was a ten year old boy, about how he filtered the specimens of water he found when he went on an expedition. School people had taken him to visit a farm a series of times for all sorts of reasons and all sorts of things had come up from the visits. One of the things that had come up for him in the third visit was some work with water. The boy collected some specimens of water from a stream at different points in the stream, took them home, and filtered them, and found there were differences in the degree of suspension in the fast running water, and the deep, slow running water; this was obviously a piece of simple, scientific investigation. In writing these observations or experiences up, the boy said, "When we went to Mr. So-and-So's farm last Wednesday, I collected specimens of water. Under the elm tree where the stream was deep, I collected one specimen; under the walnut tree where it was running shallow, I collected another." And then he went on and told what he did and how in the end he filtered the specimens and found his conclusions. Well, now, this kind of writing is what I mean by transitional writing. The fact that it was Mr. Jones' farm, the fact that it was a walnut tree and an oak

tree, had nothing to do with the scientific work which he was actually doing. But if the science teacher decided that this was not a scientific way to write, he would be ignoring the fact that, as far as Johnny was concerned, the elm tree was an elm tree; he was there; he saw it as an elm tree; it was Mr. Jones' farm; this is me, Johnny, in that position, writing about what happened. Now that's simply what I mean by the transitional.

If you try to exclude the transitional too early, then you are not going to get the kind of writing you want. The self has got to be there, to be excluded from the purely referential writing; if you get the referential writing where there has never been self, then it's not going to be very good writing.

May I just say one point to Nancy Modiano you mentioned Professor Bernstein, you mentioned Whorf. I think even Whorf said that it was the infant mind that's poured into the mould of language. He said something like this: "Language is not so much a cloak following the contours of our thought, as it is a mould." He didn't say that our minds are poured, he said that the infant mind is poured. The Whorfian hypothesis even in its severest form, a form which nobody now accepts, said only that language provides the mode of analyzing experience and can only be constricting to the infant. Beyond that stage, if a language isn't structuring experience as you want it to do, then you modify it, you invent new terms, in order that your language shall keep pace with the new distinctions you wish to make. This notion does seem to me to underlie a good deal of what I said. If you admit the notion that the process of structuring experience is one which takes place through the medium of language, you have to take into account that children with different language backgrounds will be structuring experience differently, sometimes in quite fundamentally different ways. And I think Basil Bernstein, at his most lucid, recognizes this.

H. Eleanor McMahon, Rhode Island College, Group 11:

I think that Professor Britton won his campaign with our group; there certainly was a consensus that teachers--undergraduates in teacher education programs--need to know more about the structure of language, the role of language, and the way language develops in children. Professor Britton's insistence that talk should go on, that listening to children discuss what they are doing, their interaction with objects, helps one to find out something about their thought processes suggested to me a recent tongue-in-cheek book about plans and the structure of behavior. It says that, though introspection, as a means of discovering anything about learning, had been thrown out

by the SR people, the computer people had brought it back, finding it particularly useful in attempting to program computers to solve problems. By having individuals discuss the method of solving problems which they used, they could, in turn, translate this into a computer program for solving problems.

One last comment: I found Professor Davis' description of the schools in England particularly interesting in the light of Piaget's comment to the effect that some person from Geneva had suggested to him that the best form for the elementary school would be to have two classrooms, to put the children in one and the teacher in the other.

I. Judy Craighead, New Orleans, Group 9:

Several random ideas concerning Jimmy Britton's "homespun" theory of learning and teacher training were offered by the participants, none being too pertinent. Before anyone could contribute anything especially germane, we made a discovery. There was in our group a member of the Illinois team who had recently visited "model" schools in England; consequently, her observations and experiences there became the topic of conversation during the greater part of our group (?) session. Although this participant's comments were worthy of being expressed and listened to, I do feel that things strayed pretty far afield when we were presented with a glowing review of an "almost documentary film of actual English schools" (To Sir With Love), and with an equally complimentary appraisal of the "typical school teacher in England" as portrayed by Mr. Sidney Poitier. At this point, a feeling of cultural deprivation was experienced by those of us who had never visited England or seen the movie. At the end of the period when there were only a few minutes remaining, we somehow found our way back to the subject of teacher training in the United States. It was suggested that we dispense with trying to set forth what "an ideal teacher" should be and do. Indeed, we might, instead, encourage teachers to stray a bit from the myth-like "ideal"--encourage them to learn to improvise. Practice before theory seems to be needed; when a child is being taught, the concrete or practical situation must be presented before one can transfer learning to the abstract or theoretical. So with teaching.

J. Dorothy Haupt, The Merrill-Palmer Institute, Group 9:

What seemed to be missing from our discussion of J. Britton, what was not expressed at least, was the acknowledgement that a child's willingness and ability to talk in a classroom, for example, depends not only upon the opportunity to talk and having others to lis-

ten, but upon his earlier stimulation by adults. As in the case of Miss Duckworth's presentation, little or no mention was made of the period of infancy. To me, more attention must be given to this period in all teacher education programs. Mr. Britton's emphasis on the acceptance of verbalization as evidence of children's thinking is troublesome. With preschool children, what a child says may or may not indicate his question, the point of his information, or his understanding or comprehension. While I fully support Mr. Britton's motto, "Listen-Listen-Listen," I should also like to give teachers another slogan of Stop (talking), Listen, and Look (for non-verbal communication). For example, the present emphasis on the speech and language development for culturally disadvantaged children poses a multitude of problems, not the least of which is the parent's reaction to the child's increased talking and questioning. The vivid quality of their expressive language all too frequently provokes corrections of their usage or their conventional form of address. Again, Millie Almy's questions about the "verbal facade" of many middle-class children should serve as a warning against assuming that fluency is necessarily related to knowledge or understanding; one of the problems which we face with children who have been highly rewarded by their parents whose fluency may reflect only family style, interest, and values, is to find ways of probing for their real understandings. The group faced the problem of providing options for children. It was aware that the culturally disadvantaged child has few options: he has little time to listen; time in which his expression is encouraged; his teacher has little time to give him other options.

K. John Flavell:

I had the feeling this morning after hearing the two talks, that interesting as I found Miss Duckworth's talk, I really wish I'd been chosen to comment on Jimmy Britton's talk because it came a lot closer to things I'm supposed to know something about. And I guess the sum and substance of my reaction to his talk is that I agreed completely with everything he said. I felt it was an excellent talk except that I think that everything he said, is, as it were, more true of thinking than of language, or it might be better to say that it is as true of thinking as it is of language. I have the feeling that all of the matters he described are always true of thinking and that thinking may or may not engage the linguistic process. It may engage other kinds of representational systems. And I think that we stand in some danger, perhaps this is the wrong place to say this, we stand in some danger of overestimating the role of language and of the verbal processes in human cognitive development. There is some recent evidence, for example, that Luria's experimental work on the directive function of speech just "ain't true" for certain kinds of experiments.

We've done some of this work in our own laboratories; I think that Furth's work with deaf children who think remarkably well, despite their deafness (I'm talking about deaf children who have not yet picked up a well codified sign language, or equivalent), may be suggestive as to the extent to which Mr. Britton's comments apply to thought as opposed to language.[1] And I think that these and other scatterings of evidence suggest that the pendulum, at least in developmental psychology, is changing, somewhat. I do not mean to undervalue language; nobody in his right mind would do that. I do mean to suggest that it's not everything to suggest that the Whorfian position, or any variation on it, is surely too extreme and to suggest, finally, that we look for other kinds of, as it were, intelligent things that children do, in schools or elsewhere, which are either not purely linguistic or not intrinsically and essentially linguistic.

L. Nancy Modiano:

You know, I think maybe one of our problems in this area is the confusion we sometimes make between the word "language" and the word "symbolization." Consider the work with deaf children which Mr. Flavell just mentioned: deaf children are able to symbolize. Furth's work shows very dramatically that deaf children develop the same structures of intelligence that hearing children who know words develop. If we were more careful in our own thinking and expression to delineate when we mean "words," and when we mean "symbolization," we would be better off.

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[1]Hans Furth, Thinking Without Language, Free Press, 1966.